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## COMMUNICATIONS.

### THE DECISIONS IN THE TENTH SUPPLEMENT.

Editors THE CONDOR:—

The Tenth Supplement to the A. O. U. Check-List published in the July *Auk* contains many surprises to our western ornithologists in the wholesale manner in which carefully worked out species and subspecies have been relegated to obscurity. If it were the policy of the Committee to discourage the creation of trinomials entirely our workers might well receive its decision with good grace, but when it accepts a subspecies like *Pipilo fuscus carolæ*, whose invalidity had already been pointed out by its describer, we can only conclude that our judges sit too far away to fully appreciate the conditions which surround the western worker.

Our eastern friends would not consider it strange if climatic conditions and other influences produced two subspecies in a country stretching between New York and Florida. One could readily grasp the idea that a *Geothlypis* feeding and breeding in Florida might differ from one feeding and breeding in good old New England. Now as a matter of fact we have a wider range of conditions out here in California, and that in some cases in a section of country easily covered on an ordinary map by a twenty-five cent piece. Take for instance the San Joaquin valley where there are 300 days of sunshine and a yearly rainfall of only eight inches, with a semi-arid condition existing most of the year. Compare this with the humid coast side of the range but a comparatively short distance away with 40 inches of rainfall and only 100 days of sunshine, producing a damp, foggy climate.

When it has been shown that a *Melospiza* on the humid coast side of the range differs materially in many respects: that it is only found in a given area in the breeding season, for it has never been taken elsewhere at that time; that a partial migration occurs when in the fall and winter it scatters more or less, at which times it is taken mingled with other forms of the same genus, but always returning to breed in its chosen habitat; when all these facts have been carefully shown, one feels that there is some basis for the claim that it deserves to be recognized as a subspecies.

It is to be regretted that the very carefully prepared life zone and faunal area maps of California compiled and in use by several California workers have not been published for the benefit of those who are not in a position to realize the enormous range of conditions which exist in California owing to differences of elevation, or proximity to ocean influences. Fortunately our few systematists who are working out these problems appreciate these difficulties

and are prepared to accept with good grace the decision of the Committee, knowing that it is only a question of time when these facts will be made apparent to all.

One thing however is certain, and that is our western workers have a double task in that they not only must point out a new species or subspecies, but they must also work out its whole life history, migration etc., as influenced by the peculiar topography of California, before they can hope for a ready recognition of their claims. In other words they are confronted by the necessity of a strong educational crusade along the lines noted above. Meanwhile let us not exhaust our stock of patience but rather let us hang out the sign, that in early California days, ornamented certain thriving places of business, when the knowledge of our state as a whole was as crude as is our present knowledge of its birds,—“Don’t shoot the fiddler; he’s doing the best he can.” F. S. DAGGETT.

*Pasadena, Cal., Sept. 1, 1901.*

### A DEFENSE OF BIRD HORIZONS.

Editor THE CONDOR:—

My attention has recently been called to a review and criticism of *Wilson Bulletin* No. 33, which appeared in the March-April CONDOR. While I entirely sympathize with the critic in his efforts to guard the avifauna of his home region against misrepresentation, I cannot rid myself of the impression that the purpose of ‘A Summer Reconnoissance In The West’ has been largely misconceived in his review.

The very word ‘reconnoissance’ was chosen to indicate the rapid and necessarily incomplete nature of the work. It would have been presumptuous on our part if we had thought to vie in either accuracy or completeness with carefully prepared local lists. Indeed Mr. Jones expressly says in his introduction: “In rapid work of this kind there must be a considerable margin of error.” Some few of our identifications were based entirely upon geographical considerations. It is not possible, for instance, to tell the difference, *in the field*, between a Samuel and a Herrmann Song Sparrow.

By those who do not subscribe to the sentiment that the only good bird is a dead bird, recourse must be had to authorities on distribution; and these are often meager or deficient. In view therefore of the manifest limitations of our chosen work we must modestly disclaim any intention of clashing with the local divinities in matters of expert identification. But after all, the list of errors which is accredited to my colleague in the article under consideration is easily twice too large.

A word remains, perhaps, to be said in justification of the task as we conceived it. Without any intention of publishing authoritative “local lists” it nevertheless seemed worth